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This Week's Forum: Page 26


# EDUCATION WEEK

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## Summit's Goal: Create Process To Set Targets

### *'It's a Beginning,' Secretary Contends*

**By Julie A. Miller and Reagan Walker**

WASHINGTON—When President Bush meets with the nation's governors at this week's historic education summit, he apparently will not seek agreement on specific national goals, but on a decision to launch a goal-setting process.

"It's a beginning," Secretary of Education Lauro F. Cavazos said at a news conference last week. "What follows is the most important part."

For example, he said, summit participants could agree that "we must increase literacy," and a specific target for meeting that goal could be set later.

Aides to Govs. Bill Clinton of Arkansas and Carroll A. Campbell of South Carolina had said that the governors and top White House officials agreed in a meeting Sept. 13 to aim for a consensus on national goals for school performance. *(See Education Week, Sept. 20, 1989.)*

But Mr. Clinton and several Administration officials said last week that,

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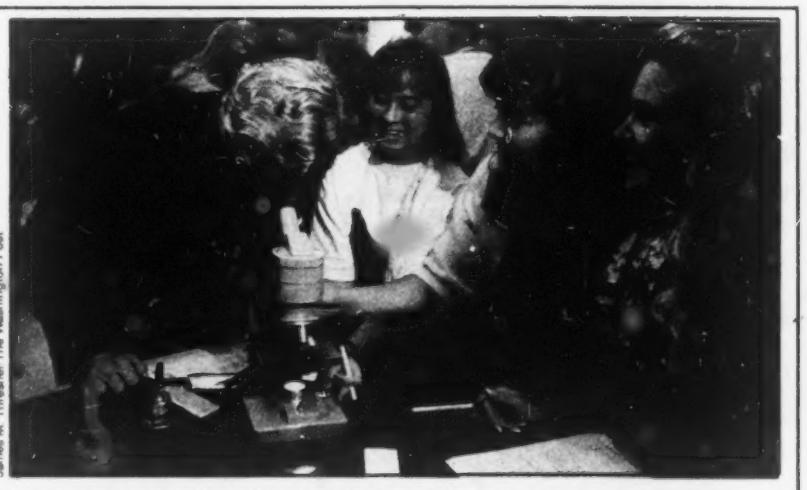
***Crossroads At Charlottesville***



James M. Thresher/The Washington Post

**Senator Edward M. Kennedy visits Maryland high school for presummit meeting.**

## *National School Goals: Old Idea Surfaces With Newfound Intensity*

**By Deborah L. Cohen**

While the President's call for an education summit has given a well-publicized lift to the notion of national education goals, educators, corporate leaders, and policymakers note that the idea was taking shape well before Mr. Bush decided to convene the nation's governors in Charlottesville, Va.

There's no doubt, they say, that the summit will galvanize the movement to set a national schools strategy—once considered anathema to the tradition of state and local control of education. But the fact is, they add, the idea has been percolating for several years.

"The summit comes at a time when there is an increasing sense that we ought to have clear expectations" of what the nation's education system is trying to accomplish, said Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States. "One could argue that the summit is being adapted to that sense, rather than the other way around."

Still, many educators acknowledge that procedural and philosophical obstacles will complicate the goal-setting process. For instance, they say, many spurn the idea of a national curriculum or rigid standards based solely on test scores, and others raise questions about who will pay for the strategies devised to meet the goals.

But, while differences will need to be

*Continued on Page 20*

## NCATE Rejects Reaccreditation For 14 Colleges

### *Denials Mark First Year Of Tougher Standards*

**By Debra Viadero**

WASHINGTON—In the first full year of operation under its tougher new set of standards, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education has denied approval to one-third of the colleges of education up for reaccreditation.

The statistics, which represent an increase over the denial rate of previous years, were released by NCATE officials last week following the group's biannual meeting here.

At that meeting, the accrediting body also voted to take a cooperative approach to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards by setting up a small committee of members to follow the work of the board.

The action was in contrast to the opposition to the board expressed the previous week by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. That group voted not to support the board's work because of its failure to include graduation from an accredited teacher-education program among its requirements for certification.

Observers within and outside of NCATE said last week that the large number of schools denied accreditation this year reflects both the quality of teacher-education programs in those institutions and the seri-

*Continued on Page 9*

## Report's Good News: Many Who Drop Out Complete Education

**By Lisa Jennings**

WASHINGTON—When Secretary of Education Lauro F. Cavazos released the first annual federal dropout estimate this month, he said the good news was that fewer students were leaving school now than in previous decades.

But researchers who have reviewed the statistics pointed last week to what may be even better news: the report's evidence that many dropouts are returning to complete their education, either at school or through some type of equivalency program.

Drawing on the Education Department's "High School and Beyond" longitudinal study of 30,000 1980 sophomores, researchers found that about half of the 17.3 percent who dropped out had, by 1986, returned to complete their education. Another 12 percent were pursuing that goal.

"This is wonderful news," said Nancy L. Peck, director of the Center for Dropout Prevention at the University of Miami.

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## Financial Awards for High-Performing Schools Are Gaining Favor

**By Michael Newman**

This fall, as Indiana begins to dole out $10 million in "rewards" to schools that meet certain goals for student achievement and attendance, Vincent Schrader will be watching anxiously.

Unlike many principals in the state, he is not worried about whether his school will win any money. Mr. Schrader is not a principal. He is manager of the state's Performance-Based Awards program, and his is a different sort of suspense.

"I'm really anxious to see how the schools will go about using the money," he said.

Award-winning schools will be able to use the cash for anything but athletics and teacher salaries or bonuses. "Beyond that," he noted, "the sky's the limit."

Indiana is one of a handful of states that in the past five years have established cash-incentive programs aimed at improving school performance.

Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina currently operate cash-incentive programs for schools or districts. Louisiana's plan is still in preparation, while a Massachusetts plan has been left unfunded since its creation two years ago.

All the programs offer additional state funds to schools or districts that show substantial improvement over previous performance. All allow the winners fairly wide latitude in deciding how to spend the money.

And, as Mr. Schrader's comments indicate, all generate a mixture of excitement and uncertainty.

The state cash-incentive programs have taken on added importance recently because they represent the most significant tests so far of an idea that is attracting increasing attention and support on the national level.

President Bush, in his package of education initiatives released last winter, gave heavy emphasis to a similar proposal, which he called the "Presidential merit schools" program. With requested funding that would eventually reach $500 million a year, the program of rewards for schools that improved student achievement, cut drug abuse, and reduced their dropout rates was the largest single element of the overall plan.

The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee approved legislation in July based on Mr. Bush's proposal, although

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### Also in the news


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A 'controlled choice' student-assignment plan is the city's hottest election issue.

**7** **Phonics or 'Whole Language'?**
That thorny question must be addressed in the pivotal 1992 reading assessment.

**10** **Sex Ed. at the Polls**
Virginia's governor's race is a referendum for some on a statewide family-life program.

## IN SUMMARY

**Making Schools 'Effective'**
Principles of the "effective schools" movement are in place or slated for adoption in more than half the nation's school districts, according to a survey by the General Accounting Office. **Page 4.**

**Oklahoma City Turnaround**
In a rare judicial move, a federal appellate panel has vacated its recent ruling that the city's neighborhood-schools policy violates a court-ordered desegregation plan. **Page 5.**

**New York Chancellor Named**
Joseph A. Fernandez, who gained national attention as school superintendent in Dade County, Fla., has been selected to be the next chancellor of the New York City public schools. **Page 5.**

**Assessing Reading Skills**
A series of meetings beginning this week will aid the National Assessment of Educational Progress in deciding how to measure reading skills in its 1992 4th-grade assessment. **Page 7.**

**Teachers: Problems, Progress**
The annual Metropolitan Life survey shows teachers are alarmed by the societal and health problems of students, but are more upbeat about school reform and their professional standing. **Page 8.**

**The Content of Reform**
The structural reforms being tested by schools in 27 states must include an emphasis on "what is taught and how it is taught," the leader of the nation's governors said last week. **Page 10.**

**Education and the Disabled**
A national commission on special education is needed to spotlight the needs of disabled students, an influential Presidential panel concludes in a report issued last week. **Page 14.**


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# ACROSS THE NATION

## NATIONAL

### Macmillan Adds Merrill To Publishing Holdings

Macmillan Inc., a leading textbook publisher purchased last November by the British publisher Robert Maxwell, last week announced its acquisition of Merrill Publishing from Bell & Howell Company for $260 million in cash.

Merrill Publishing, a Columbus, Ohio-based publisher of elementary, high-school, and college textbooks, is best known for its books in the science field.

Mr. Maxwell acquired Macmillan in a $2.5-billion takeover deal last November, adding substantially to the British publisher's stake in the American educational publishing industry.

■ **In the 1970's and 1980's, community colleges have shifted their emphasis to vocational training and have reduced their commitment to liberal-arts students who plan to transfer to four-year colleges**, two scholars contend in a book published last week.

*The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985*, is being touted as the most comprehensive study to date on the role of community colleges. Its authors are Steven Brint, associate professor of sociology at Yale University, and Jerome Karabel, associate professor of sociology at the University of California at Berkeley.

One consequence of the shift in emphasis is a dramatic decline in the transfer rate from two- to four-year colleges, which is now below 20 percent, the scholars state.

"For students who wish to obtain a bachelor's degree, attendance at a community college independently lowers their prospects of success," the authors argue. This has serious consequences for minorities, women, and the economically disadvantaged—groups "that are disproportionately concentrated in two-year colleges," the authors write.

## STATES

### Alternative Certification Backed For Superintendents in Arizona

The Arizona state board of education has voted to create an alternative-certification program for superintendents.

The state attorney general's office and the secretary of state must approve and certify the board's decision within the next three months before it can take effect.

Under the program, candidates could obtain alternative certification if they had at least a master's degree, eight years of managerial experience, and demonstrated skills in organization planning and in program and staff development. Candidates would have to complete 12 semester hours of course work in educational administration within two years of beginning the post.

Only districts that already have an administrator certified as a superintendent to oversee curriculum and instruction would be allowed to request a waiver for alternative certification.

■ **Public-school superintendents in Alaska have received a draft list of desired student outcomes** from the Alaska state board of education.

The list outlines eight areas in which "Alaskans should expect children to receive [instruction] as a result of public schooling."

"We feel these outcomes are broad, defendable, interdisciplinary, and doable," said Sue Wilken, a member of the state board. She said the board is seeking advice from local educators and others before making the list final.

According to the draft list, the state board expects students to be able to communicate effectively; think logically and critically; discover and nurture their own creative talents; master essential technological skills; demonstrate responsible citizenship; develop a commitment to health and fitness; develop personal responsibility to sustain themselves economically; and acquire a positive self-image.

## DISTRICTS

### Public-School Students Ordered Out of Catholic Facility in Mass.

School officials in Bridgewater, Mass., must remove two public-school students from classes held at a Roman Catholic parish facility, leased by the district to accommodate an overflow of elementary students, a federal judge has ordered.

The Massachusetts Civil Liberties Union sued the Bridgewater district on behalf of two students because the facility, formerly used as a school, contains Catholic religious symbols and because the students were regularly greeted by a Catholic priest.

U.S. District Judge Mark L. Wolfe issued the preliminary injunction calling for the two students' transfer. The plaintiffs are also seeking the invalidation of the lease between the school district and the church.

The judge wrote that the plaintiffs appear likely to prevail in their claim that the lease violates the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution.

It "appears that the lease involves an impermissible delegation or sharing of Bridgewater's responsibility for the public school curriculum with the Roman Catholic Church, and thus excessively tangles church and state," the judge wrote.

■ **Two Arizona school districts, which together served one of the nation's largest populations of Indian students, have dissolved a long-standing partnership in which they jointly administered a single high school.**

For more than 15 years, students from the Tuba City public schools and a local tribal boarding school attended a single high school on the Navajo reservation as a economy measure. But critics, including members of the two local school boards, argued that the system—in which separate administrations oversaw different student bodies in the same building—was confusing and counterproductive.

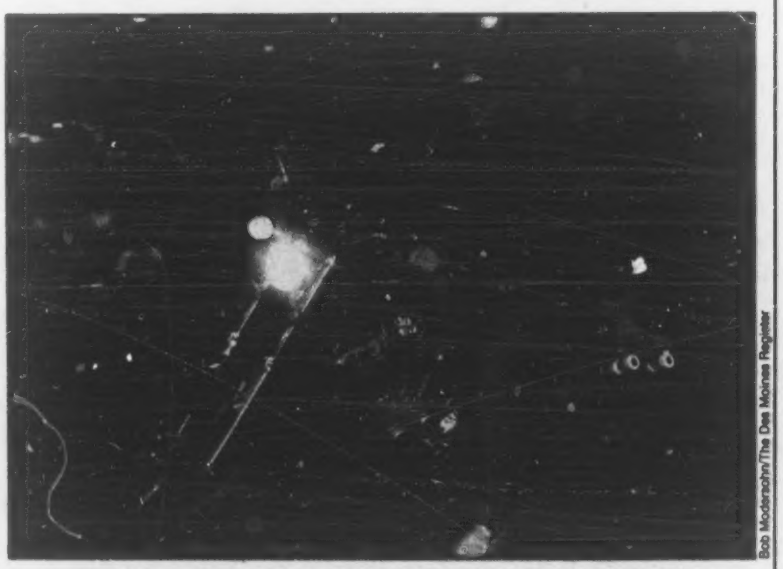
This year, the schools opened as separate entities within the same building, with Tuba City High School offering conventional morning and evening classes for public-school students, and the newly founded Gray Hills High School serving boarding-school students during a longer school day.

Despite community concerns that the arrangement would duplicate and weaken programs, both schools continue to meet interim accreditation standards, pending an annual review, according to Betty Ojaye, the executive director of the Navajo North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, which accredits reservation schools.

■ **Parents and students in Purdy, Mo., are appealing a federal court ruling that the Purdy school board has the right to ban school dances.**

The suit is jokingly referred to as the "Footloose" case, after a movie about a teenager who dares to dance in defiance of the

## *Easy-Riding Principal*



Bob Modersohn/The Des Moines Register

**Stanley Norenberg, principal of Adel-DeSoto High School in Adel, Iowa, guns his Harley-Davidson motorcycle across the stage during a first-day-of-school assembly. The 57-year-old Norenberg said he used the motorcycle as a device to grab the attention of the 350 students at the early-morning session last month.**

# NAEP Board Is Seeking A Consensus on Reading

By Robert Rothman

WASHINGTON—Entering one of the most emotional and divisive debates in education, the governing board of the National Assessment of Educational Progress has begun the thorny task of creating objectives for its 1992 4th-grade reading test.

Beginning this week, the board will hold a series of public hearings nationwide aimed at developing a consensus on the skills and knowledge to be tested on the assessment. During the summer, the board sent out 1,600 letters inviting both the public and reading specialists to the hearings.

The outcome of the six-month process could exert a strong influence on state curricula, because the 1992 assessment will be the first to include state-by-state comparisons of reading-achievement scores.

In addition, observers say, the assessment would likely be used to help measure progress toward any national goals in student achievement that emerge from this week's summit between President Bush and the nation's governors.

But many board members and reading experts contend that the board faces an uphill task in trying to reach an agreement on the highly contentious issue of how to measure reading performance in the primary grades. The board must accommodate views that range from a heavy emphasis on phonics, or letter-to-sound identification, to a "whole language" approach that stresses reading in context.

"Getting an agreement will take quite a lot of palaver," said the panel's chairman, Chester E. Finn Jr., professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University. "Primary-grade reading is probably the stage of reading that is most controversial in America."

### States Want 'a Role'

The process for developing a common view on the goals and content of the reading assessment is one of the most elaborate undertaken by NAEP's policymaking body, according to State Representative Wilhelmina Z. Delco of Texas, chairman of the governing board's reading committee.

"We have tried to bend over backwards to increase awareness of what we are doing and raise the level of participation," she said.

In the past, when NAEP conducted a national assessment only, Mr. Finn added, fewer people participated in the process.

"When you administer a test on which states are going to be compared," he said, "it is legitimate for states to want to know what's in it, and to have a role in it, to ensure that the test is a tolerable facsimile of what they teach."

The 1990 8th-grade mathematics assessment will also be conducted at the state level. But for that test, Mr. Finn said, NAEP relied on the standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which had already laid the groundwork for consensus-building in that field.

By contrast, no comparable effort has been undertaken by a reading group, Mr. Finn noted.

In addition to plowing new ground, the board must also contend with sharp political divisions over methods of teaching reading. Both reading specialists and lay people have strongly held beliefs on the issue, said P. David Pearson, dean of the college of education at the University of Illinois.

### Religion, Not Science

"Reading is more a religion than a science," he told the board at its quarterly meeting here this month.

Mr. Pearson and Connie Juel, professor of reading at the University of Texas, outlined for the board their differing views of reading and the implications those views hold for the assessment.

According to Ms. Juel, NAEP assessments tend to place too great an emphasis on reading-comprehension skills, and not enough on the more basic skills of word recognition and oral-language comprehension, or understanding what words mean.

> Series of four public hearings to help develop 1992 test objectives.

As a result, she said, analyses of the assessments may mask problems in the basic skills.

"I'm concerned about a great number of kids who do poorly on the test not because they can't reason, but because they can't recognize words," Ms. Juel said. "We've got to make sure kids can do that."

"Before you assess how fast you can run," she added, "first assess how well you stand on your own two feet."

But Mr. Pearson warned that such an assessment might prompt schools to focus on the basic skills, when in fact many experts believe students can learn those skills implicitly while they learn comprehension.

Rather than test discrete skills, he said, the assessment should "minimize the gap between what readers do when they read and what they do on the test."

Faced with such disparate views, Mr. Finn said the board might conclude that it is unable to devise a single reading assessment.

"It's possible we'll end up with a multiple-format assessment," he said, noting that NAEP currently assesses writing by using several formats. "I hope not."

The dates and locations for the board's public hearings on the 1992 assessment are as follows: Sept. 27, Dallas (Richland College, Performance Hall); Oct. 11, Trenton, N.J. (Trenton Board of Education); Oct. 26, Los Angeles (Los Angeles County Board Room, Downey); and Nov. 3, Atlanta (Georgia Tech, Southern Regional Education Board Headquarters).

More information is available from the National Assessment Governing Board, Mary E. Switzer Building, Suite 4060, 330 C Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20202-7583; telephone: (202) 732-7885.

## DATABANK

### Profiles of the 55 Largest School Districts, 1987-88

| District | Location | No. of Schools | No. of Teachers | No. of Students | No. of Graduates |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New York City Schools | Brooklyn, N.Y. | 960 | 52,953 | 939,933 | 37,095 |
| Los Angeles Unified School District | Los Angeles, Calif. | 621 | 25,088 | 589,311 | 24,114 |
| City of Chicago School District 29 | Chicago, Ill. | 597 | 21,753 | 419,537 | 17,157 |
| Dade County School District | Miami, Fla. | 292 | 14,014 | 253,323 | 11,916 |
| Houston Independent School District | Houston, Tex. | 239 | 10,499 | 191,708 | 8,216 |
| Philadelphia City School District | Philadelphia, Pa. | 255 | 10,756 | 189,031 | 9,318 |
| Detroit City School District | Detroit, Mich. | 280 | — | 184,927 | — |
| Hawaii Department of Education | Honolulu, Hawaii | 229 | 9,270 | 166,139 | 10,371 |
| Broward County School District | Fort Lauderdale, Fla. | 165 | 7,104 | 137,366 | 7,153 |
| Dallas Independent School District | Dallas, Tex. | 188 | 6,904 | 130,885 | 6,015 |
| Fairfax County Public Schools | Fairfax, Va. | 179 | 7,500 | 127,752 | 10,795 |
| Hillsborough County School District | Tampa, Fla. | 165 | 6,962 | 118,031 | 6,146 |
| San Diego City Unified School District | San Diego, Calif. | 154 | 4,773 | 116,557 | 6,229 |
| Baltimore City Public School System | Baltimore, Md. | 179 | 5,696 | 110,189 | 4,802 |
| Memphis City School District | Memphis, Tenn. | 163 | 5,225 | 107,819 | 5,086 |
| Duval County School District | Jacksonville, Fla. | 146 | 5,623 | 105,049 | 4,739 |
| Prince Georges County Public Schools | Landover, Md. | 171 | 5,692 | 104,412 | 7,298 |
| Clark County School District | Las Vegas, Nev. | 125 | 4,438 | 100,027 | 5,094 |
| Montgomery County Public Schools | Rockville, Md. | 156 | 5,571 | 96,271 | 8,046 |
| Jefferson County Public Schools | Louisville, Ky. | 159 | 5,287 | 93,198 | 5,028 |
| Milwaukee School District | Milwaukee, Wis. | 145 | 5,565 | 91,648 | 3,811 |
| Palm Beach County School District | West Palm Beach, Fla. | 124 | 5,587 | 89,944 | 4,361 |
| Orange County School District | Orlando, Fla. | 127 | 5,042 | 88,878 | 3,951 |
| Pinellas County School District | Clearwater, Fla. | 120 | 5,321 | 88,866 | 5,050 |
| District of Columbia Public Schools | Washington, D.C. | 166 | 5,498 | 86,296 | 3,842 |
| Albuquerque School District | Albuquerque, N.M. | 117 | 4,424 | 82,416 | 4,686 |
| Orleans Parish School Board | New Orleans, La. | 123 | 4,663 | 81,503 | 3,427 |
| Baltimore County Public Schools | Towson, Md. | 149 | 4,945 | 81,152 | 6,049 |
| Jefferson County School District R-1 | Lakewood, Colo. | 123 | 3,556 | 75,337 | 5,103 |
| Mecklenburg Charlotte School District | Charlotte, N.C. | 106 | 3,889 | 74,680 | 4,353 |
| Granite School District | Salt Lake City, Utah | 98 | 3,316 | 73,419 | 3,436 |
| Cleveland City School District | Cleveland, Ohio | 130 | 3,578 | 71,743 | 3,108 |
| Dekalb County School District | Decatur, Ga. | 103 | 4,100 | 71,632 | 5,393 |
| Mobile County School District | Mobile, Ala. | 86 | 3,110 | 67,550 | 3,533 |
| Fort Worth Independent School District | Fort Worth, Tex. | 110 | 3,184 | 67,191 | 3,168 |
| Nashville-Davidson County School District | Nashville, Tenn. | 119 | 3,868 | 66,993 | 2,907 |
| Long Beach Unified School District | Long Beach, Calif. | 80 | 2,772 | 66,253 | 3,525 |
| Columbus City School District | Columbus, Ohio | 139 | 3,568 | 65,464 | 3,329 |
| Virginia Beach City Public Schools | Virginia Beach, Va. | 66 | 3,377 | 64,510 | 3,655 |
| Anne Arundel County Public Schools | Annapolis, Md. | 113 | 3,555 | 64,432 | 4,213 |
| Atlanta City School District | Atlanta, Ga. | 113 | 3,737 | 64,408 | 3,679 |
| San Francisco Unified School District | San Francisco, Calif. | 110 | 2,929 | 63,661 | 4,362 |
| Cobb County School District | Marietta, Ga. | 74 | 3,536 | 63,564 | 3,022 |
| El Paso Independent School District | El Paso, Tex. | 74 | 3,392 | 61,800 | 3,421 |
| Fresno Unified School District | Fresno, Calif. | 84 | 2,619 | 61,539 | 2,408 |
| San Antonio Independent School District | San Antonio, Tex. | 97 | 3,393 | 61,501 | 2,525 |
| Jordan School District | Sandy, Utah | 67 | 2,746 | 61,488 | 2,963 |
| Austin Independent School District | Austin, Tex. | 103 | 3,879 | 61,402 | 3,188 |
| Polk County School District | Bartow, Fla. | 102 | 3,504 | 61,244 | 2,789 |
| Wake County School District | Raleigh, N.C | 80 | 3,422 | 59,687 | 3,826 |
| Denver County School District 1 | Denver, Colo. | 113 | 3,512 | 59,439 | 2,750 |
| Boston School District | Boston, Mass. | 119 | — | 59,223 | 2,763 |
| Mesa Unified School District 4 | Mesa, Ariz. | 59 | 2,700 | 59,051 | 2,611 |
| Gwinnett County School District | Lawrenceville, Ga. | 64 | 2,945 | 58,047 | 2,764 |
| East Baton Rouge Parish School Board | Baton Rouge, La. | 102 | 3,443 | 57,697 | 3,483 |

Dashes indicate data is not available

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe" survey, 1987-88, and "Public Elementary/Secondary Agency Universe" survey, 1987-88.

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EW

# Report Finds Dropouts Often Finish School

*Continued from Page 1*

Only a few small studies have attempted before now to gauge return rates, she noted, and they have shown similar findings.

The report's message for educators, Ms. Peck said, is that "schools should be working harder to recruit dropouts to return."

But she and others cited the need for better and more inclusive data collection for the national dropout count. In particular, they said, the lack of statistics from the pre-high-school years may give a false picture of the dimensions of the problem.

"Kids are dropping out like flies in middle school," said the Miami center's director. "With all our optimism about a decreasing rate, we're still not counting everybody."

### Getting a Statistical 'Handle'

The federal report, released Sept. 14 by the National Center for Education Statistics, relied primarily on Census Bureau data. It estimated that, for the three-year period from 1985 to 1988, the average national dropout rate for students in grades 10 through 12 was 4.4 percent—a 2 percent decline from the rate a decade earlier. *(See Education Week, Sept. 20, 1989.)*

Officials who compiled the report responded to criticisms of its methodology by noting that it is the first step in an evolving process, one that will ultimately include specific state counts for dropouts. Future versions of the Congressionally mandated report, they noted, may include data from grades earlier than 10th grade.

The N.C.E.S. is currently training state officials to record the dropout data that will be collected for future annual reports. The collection method is to be pilot-tested in 27 states next year. *(See Education Week, March 29, 1989.)*

"There are still potential problems, and we're still in the experimental phase," said Mary J. Frase, a senior analyst with the N.C.E.S. and author of the dropout report. "But we're giving it our best shot to see what happens."

To Barbara S. Clements, director of the education-data-improvement project for the Council of Chief State School Officers, a group that has assisted in the drive toward a national dropout count, the encouraging signs in this first federal estimate were "very exciting news."

"I'm pleased that we are finally getting a handle on some statistics we can work with," Ms. Clements said. She added that "it's important for us to see that we're not as far away from our goal of 100 percent graduation rates as we thought."

Much of the N.C.E.S.'s dropout-return data confirms estimates made previously by the General Educational Development Testing Service, said Douglas R. Whitney, its director.

The federal report found that, of those who dropped out in the cohort group and later returned to complete their education, one-third went back to school for a diploma, the other two-thirds earned a G.E.D., or some other equivalency certificate. (The G.E.D. program accounts for 90 percent of equivalency degrees.)

G.E.D. officials have estimated that the program picks up about 75 percent of school dropouts, Mr. Whitney said. But he noted that the program's state offices are stepping up their efforts to keep students in school. In Pennsylvania, for example, a program in which G.E.D. graduates visit high schools across the state to encourage students not to drop out has been instituted.

### Dropout-Recovery Program

"The G.E.D. is really a 'dropout recovery' program," Mr. Whitney said. "But we would love it if there were no more dropouts. Even if that were true, we'd still have another 51 million adults to reach who have never completed their education."

Last year, the G.E.D. program provided more than 430,000 people with equivalency certificates—9 percent fewer than the previous year. More than 736,000 people took the test, a 3 percent decline after a fairly steady increase over the past 20 years.

Mr. Whitney attributed the decline to slightly revised recording methods. The test was also revamped in 1987, he noted, to reflect the trend toward stricter graduation standards. It now includes an essay section and other efforts to evaluate higher-order skills.

Most states prohibit dropouts younger than age 17 from taking the test, to prevent students from dropping out simply to take the alternative route, the program director said.

But Virginia has this year become the first state in which G.E.D. officials have relaxed age limits to allow students to take the test while still in school. The intent is to allow some students to make up lost class credits that might prevent them from graduating. Often, such students end up dropping out before they complete the requirements,Mr. Whitney said.

The apparent success of the G.E.D. and other equivalency programs in attracting dropouts raises an entirely different set of dropout questions, according to Ms. Frase of the N.C.E.S.

"We're now faced with the question: What does it mean to get an equivalency credential? How will this compare with a regular diploma?" she said.

Mr. Whitney acknowledged that some studies have demonstrated a slightly lower performance level in college for G.E.D. graduates, as opposed to those with a regular high-school diploma. But he argued that not enough research has been done in this area.

It would be nearly impossible, he added, to control for differences in the life experiences of regular students and G.E.D. graduates, who tend to be older and to have held jobs.

The N.C.E.S. report notes that studies of military recruits have found that those with an alternative credential are less likely to complete their tour of duty than those with a diploma.

But the findings also indicate that literacy skills for G.E.D. recipients are generally higher than those of other dropouts, though lower than high-school graduates'.

### Hispanic Rates Raise Concerns

The report's findings suggest that, in the main, the same factors that keep students in school may also be associated with higher return rates.

Hispanic students, who were found in the study to have the highest dropout rate of any group, were also the least likely to return to school after dropping out.

The average dropout rate for Hispanics during the three-year period studied was 9.27 percent, more than double the 4.20 percent rate recorded for whites and substantially greater than the 5.78 percent rate for blacks.

Blacks and whites, moreover, were found to be returning to school at virtually the same rate—50 percent. The return rate for Hispanics was 35.5 percent.

Though many of those questioned last week said they had not had time to thoroughly analyze the data, many, like Ms. Clements of the C.C.S.S.O., said the Hispanic dropout figures raised deep concerns.

The most frequently cited area of concern, however, was the lack of adequate data on what many researchers believe is a substantial, though underreported, dropout rate among middle-school students.

The N.C.E.S.'s Ms. Frase acknowledged that collecting data for that age group may prove difficult for future annual reports.

Most states, she said, have compulsory-attendance laws for students age 16 and younger. Thus, in reporting dropouts, schools are very reluctant to include younger students in that category. They will more often list such students as truant, if at all, she said.

Ms. Peck of the Center for Dropout Prevention noted that, because of the G.E.D.'s age limits, younger dropouts often end up without any options except the street and drugs.

Ms. Peck was one of several researchers who expressed some skepticism about the reliability of the N.C.E.S. study. Dropout statistics, she said, can be very misleading.

Robert Kominski, senior survey research advisor for the Census Bureau's population division, from which much of the N.C.E.S. report's data was drawn, acknowledged the difficulties that varying definitions of the term "dropout" have presented in collecting accurate dropout data. But he said that though there are "different estimates of dropouts out there, the numbers often come together."

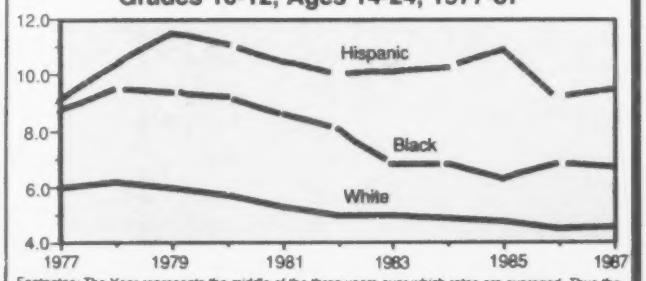
He predicted, however, that the pilot program in the states next year might result in more misleading information—mainly because states will have a vested interest in not reporting high rates, especially those for younger students.

Ms. Frase, however, disagreed. "States are very willing to do this, they want to have comparable national data," she said.

As for the current national count, Ms. Peck expressed the sentiments of many when she voiced concern that the rates cited in the federal estimate might send a message to educators that "we can afford to be complacent."

"No one is off the hook," she said. "We still have enormous problems."

**Three-Year Average Event Dropout Rate, Grades 10-12, Ages 14-24, 1977-87**




Footnotes: The Year represents the middle of the three years over which rates are averaged. Thus the rate for 1987 is the average of the single-year rates for the 12-month periods ending October 1986, 1987, and 1988.
Hispanics may be of any race.

SOURCE: R. Kominski, "What is the National High School Dropout Rate?," unpublished paper, March 1989; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "School Enrollment-Social and Economic Characteristics of Students, October (various years), Current Population Reports, Series P-20, and unpublished tabulations.

**Change in Dropout Status of 1980 Sophomores Between 1982 and 1986 by Sociodemographic and Geographic Characteristics**

| | Percent of Cohort | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Dropouts 1982 | Did Not Complete School by 1986 | Completed School 1982-86 | Percent of Dropouts Completed School 1982-86 |
| Sex | | | | |
| Male | 19.3 | 10.1 | 9.2 | 47.5 |
| Female | 15.2 | 8.4 | 6.9 | 45.2 |
| Race/ethnicity | | | | |
| White | 14.8 | 7.6 | 7.2 | 48.4 |
| Black | 22.2 | 11.4 | 10.8 | 48.5 |
| Hispanic | 27.9 | 18.0 | 9.9 | 35.5 |
| Asian | 8.2 | 2.0 | 6.2 | 75.8 |
| American Indian/ Alaskan Native | 35.5 | 27.1 | 8.4 | 23.7 |
| Socioeconomic status | | | | |
| Highest quartile | 6.6 | 2.4 | 4.2 | 64.2 |
| Second quartile | 10.2 | 4.0 | 6.2 | 60.6 |
| Third quartile | 14.3 | 7.3 | 6.9 | 48.6 |
| Lowest quartile | 22.1 | 13.0 | 9.2 | 41.5 |
| Unknown | 78.0 | 48.7 | 29.3 | 37.5 |
| Metropolitan status | | | | |
| Urban | 24.5 | 13.6 | 10.9 | 44.5 |
| Suburban | 15.1 | 7.1 | 8.0 | 53.0 |
| Rural | 15.6 | 9.5 | 6.1 | 39.0 |
| Total | 17.3 | 9.2 | 8.0 | 46.5 |

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

# Philadelphia School's Program Enlists Dropouts in Community Service

Over the past decade, youth-service corps in cities across the country have been gaining popularity as another means to "catch" and recover school dropouts.

Young dropouts may join a corps, and earn some money performing public-service work for their community. At the same time, they can take courses to prepare themselves for the General Educational Development, or G.E.D., exam to earn a high-school equivalency certificate. Many corps members end up returning to school, according to youth-service advocates.

In Philadelphia, one high-school principal has developed an unusual dropout-recruitment program based on the same concept.

Harry C. Silcox, principal of Abraham Lincoln High School, last month brought together 21 dropouts from his school to form their own local youth-service corps.

The program—funded by the Philadelphia Youth Service Corps, which takes in youths throughout the area—will pay members a stipend of $180 a week to work in the community. At the end of a year, members will also receive $2,000 in tuition fees toward furthering their education.

Members will keep busy picking up litter, cleaning graffiti, and painting homes of elderly residents, as well as other projects.

"The work," said Mr. Silcox, "must reinforce to the young people that what they are doing is worthwhile."

Corps members will also be required to spend half of each school day taking classes to earn credits toward a diploma, or toward a G.E.D. certificate, Mr. Silcox said.

Students who opt for the equivalency certificate and pass the test will be allowed to attend graduation ceremonies with the rest of their class, he added.

The goal of the plan, he said, is simply to bring back as many of his own dropouts as possible.

Some parents have complained, however, that Mr. Silcox's plan will encourage students to drop out in order to join the corps, but the principal is convinced that will not happen.

Students may not join the corps, he noted, until three months after they drop out. In addition, all applicants must go through a rigorous "boot camp"-style training program with the larger Philadelphia corps to determine their eligibility before they are admitted into the local group.

Many will not be able to meet the strict disciplinary requirements of the group. But for those who can, it may be an opportunity to "discover hidden talents that otherwise would never have been noticed," Mr. Silcox contends.

Many students simply cannot function in the traditional high-school setting, he acknowledged, noting that years ago, Sylvester Stallone, the movie actor, was expelled from the city's Lincoln High School for that reason.

"Youngsters like that should not be in a regular school program," he argued. "But that doesn't mean we should abandon them."

"If there's one thing I believe about education," he said, "it's that there ought to be options." —t.d.